



NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Funding Available for Landowners to Restore Wildlife Habitat on Farmland

NASHVILLE, TN, September 1, 2004 — On August 4, 2004, President Bush announced exciting new opportunities for restoring wildlife habitat on farmland through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a voluntary program that enables landowners to remove highly sensitive cropland from agricultural production in return for financial incentives and annual payments from USDA Farm Service Agency.

One of the major changes to the program is the addition of the CRP Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative which introduces a conservation practice intended to create 250,000 acres of early successional grass buffers along agricultural field borders. This new CRP practice is known as CP33 - Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds (commonly referred to as "Bobwhite Buffers".) USDA estimates that this nesting and brood-rearing cover will increase bobwhite quail numbers by 750,000 birds annually. Planted buffers will also benefit other wildlife species while reducing soil erosion and improving water quality by trapping field sediments and nutrients.

If a landowner desires to enroll in the CRP program and meets basic land eligibility requirements, they may establish a field border around the perimeter of a crop field that can range from 30-120 feet in width. These borders can be planted to native grasses, an important nesting cover for quail, with cost-share provided by USDA. In addition, landowners will receive a one-time signing incentive payment of \$100 per acre, and annual rental payments for the life of the contract with USDA. In many cases, payments received through the CRP program will exceed what the landowner is currently making from crop production in these field border areas.

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The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

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An additional \$50 per acre incentive payment is also provided by Quail Unlimited, Inc. for landowners in 10 Middle Tennessee counties if they install the new CRP field border practice. These counties are Coffee, Franklin, Lincoln, Giles, Marshall, Maury, Sumner, Robertson, Montgomery, and Stewart. Once the practice is installed, payment will be distributed to the landowner from Quail Unlimited. However, there is a limited amount of money available for the Quail Unlimited incentive, so funding will be distributed to landowners on a first come, first serve basis until the money is allocated. These 10 counties represent a focus area in Middle Tennessee that was established last year for bobwhite quail through a National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Grant that was obtained through the efforts of Quail Unlimited and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

Signup for the new CRP field border practice is scheduled to begin October 1, 2004 at local USDA Service Centers across the state. There is a limited amount of acres available for this program and farmers are encouraged to sign up early if they are interested.

For additional information, contact your local USDA Service Center or the following NRCS Biologists: West Tennessee, Mike Hansbrough at 731/668-0700, Extension 112; Middle Tennessee, Chris Wolkonowski at (615) 893-9295, Extension 112; East Tennessee, Robin Mayberry at 865/523-3338, Extension 113.

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